

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS

SCHOOL OF ART

VISUAL ARTS GRADUATE PROGRAM

MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

LUCAS POSADA

REPORT

PRESENTED IN FULFILMENT OF REQUIREMENTS OF THE

MASTER OF VISUAL ARTS

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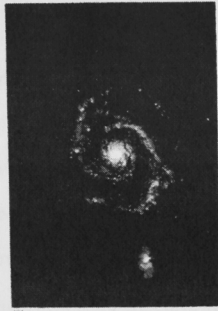
## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the help I received from the following academic staff at the School of Art:

- Bob Boynes, Head of the Painting workshop
- Ruth Waller, Lecturer at the Painting workshop
- Nigel Lendon, Convenor at the School of Art
- Joanne Searle, Lecturer at the Ceramic workshop
- Gilbert Riedelbauch, Lecturer at School of Art

I am particularly grateful with Ruth Waller; she went through this report in depth several times bringing new lights and grammatical corrections to it.





## CONTEXT - ANALYSIS OF INFLUENCE

Prior to the Scientific Revolution in the seventeenth century, people in the West viewed themselves as belonging to nature. "Rocks, trees, rivers and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human beings felt at home in this environment... A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in its drama..."(pg 2 Morris Berman). This way of understanding the world is called by Berman as "participating consciousness".

With Descartes, not only did we lose a participating consciousness and inherit the principles of Mechanical Philosophy in which we break into smaller parts and distance ourselves from the known world to be known out there, but we generated a sceptical and a disconnected manner of dealing with reality, distrusting every piece of information that our senses received unless they were placed under the scrutiny of the scientific method and weighed as true by the power of the mathematical imperative (methodical doubt).

A technological paradigm was established and suddenly the world became a reality to be subdivided, measured, transformed and possessed. Under the Cartesian model, the mind was separated from the body (I think, therefore I am), likewise people distanced themselves and lost the meaning of their relation with the surrounding nature. "The hallmark of modern consciousness is that it recognizes no element of mind in the so-called inert objects that surround us. The whole materialist position, in fact assumes the existence of a world 'out there' independent of human thought, which is 'in here'..."(page57, Berman)

"Descartes...canonized, the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction. According to this principle, a thing cannot both be and not be at the same time...Since the Cartesian paradigm recognizes no self-contradictions in logic, and since logic (or geometry), according to

Descartes, is the way nature behaves and is known to us, the paradigm allows for no self-contradictions in nature.” ( page 23, Berman) .

The dualist approach to reality together with the non-contradiction principle, became the piercing head of the arrow of the West perspective on centuries to follow.

Descartes believed that dreams were aberrations and had nothing to offer to the knowledge of the world, since they challenge the non-contradiction principle.

I have to acknowledge at this stage that my artistic search centres on the dismantling of the current scientific paradigm, meeting head-on the Cartesian non-contradiction principle and the scientific paradigm as a target. This western enlightenment tradition has an atomistic approach and a disenchanted way of apprehending the world, having given birth to an epistemology of non-participating consciousness.

I am searching for re-enchantment of the world and so my artistic journey is a depiction itself of this urge. The images like the spiral and the stupa upon which I decide to reflect as portraits of maps of a reality of the mind, are my idea of exploration for archetypal symbols that lie at the pool of the collective unconscious. These are manifest throughout the world in many cultures and forms, reflecting the experience of connection with an enchanted universe. My vision of this mind is one that accepts as part of it not only the contents of the measurable reality or conscious world but the realm of dreams and of the unknown and the ungraspable under the lens of a simple logic rationale.



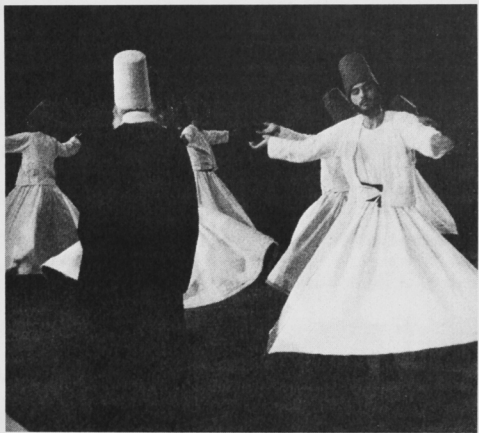
## SPIRAL

If I were to sum up in one word the central concern of my art, it would be that of 'time'.

The spiral and the stupa are signs of passage of time.

The spiral has been the central-vertebrae for my plastic research at ANU, for my MVA program. When I think of the spiral, I contemplate evolution. I visualize the revolving path of life and events searching for a centre and moving along the workings of time.

It is an ever-present symbol through out the history of humankind, and you can find it inscribed all over the art of many cultures. You can observe it in the ziggurats in Babylon, in the headdresses in Egypt, in the dances of the Dervishes within the Sufi tradition, in the body and face painting of Maori warriors, just to mention few.



"Descartes envisaged the matter of the universe circulating in whirlpools, or vortices." (page 30 , Berman). Unlike Newton, Descartes believed that the spiral motion was a trademark to the evolving activity of the universe. "Descartes rendered the universe as a sphere, as a big container defined by indefinitely extended radii... pocked-marked with whirlpools that suck extension into tight yet dynamic knots" (page 401 and 402 ,Cope in Hargittai and Pickover).



## STUPA

The stupa is generated through the process of an active spiral looking for the centre in space. The stupa as a metaphor of a map of the mind, symbolises the rising energy through time of the psyche, moving in from the deepest and further levels of information of who we are (our species' rising journey), buried in our unconscious, to the closest and evident depictions of what our consciousness believes us to be ('the now and here self'). The stupa image condenses within itself the rising thrust of energy needed for enlightenment, as a metaphor of the discovery of the diverse levels of our mind.

I will use the image of a mountain (a stupa like image) to try and portray my understanding of a map of the mind. I understand the mountain to be both what is above the sea level surface as to what is underneath and reaches the core of the earth. The unconscious would be the undersea level structure, and the conscious domains the pinnacle of land explicit to our eyes. Jung's Collective Unconscious would be the central part of this underwater structure reaching down to the centre of the earth, fire spring of all the dislodging continents, ranges and mountains thereafter. As we ascend in the direction of continents and ranges we might be starting the journey into the lands of the individual unconscious, and subsequently to the particular risen peaks above sea level, manifesting the visible individual conscious domains. The stupa is an image of this ascending mountain symbol, and a metaphor to a map of the mind.



## NEW PARADIGM

There is a world-wide call at the turn of the century: to generate a different way of approach to our understanding of the world, a new paradigm: one that authenticates all that quantum mechanics has been able to corroborate in terms of not separating object and subject in interaction, unlike the Cartesian scientific perspective. In the process of finding new re-

enchanted epistemological alternatives and generating a more holistic understanding and perspective of the world, traditional and indigenous epistemologies have something to offer as well as late western Alchemy.

Without having had any contact with the roots and expression of the current scientific paradigm, traditional and indigenous cultures and religions have examples of active dialogues with realities that fall beyond our rationale logic. Diverse as many are the illustrations I could bring along, but if I were to mention one, the androgenous symbol, present in many ways throughout varied cultures, condenses within itself the presence of a reality in which opposites do co-exist simultaneously. This reality cannot be apprehended by an epistemology that is embedded in the existence of a non-contradiction principle and the Cartesian paradigm. It can be dealt with if there is a different way of thinking such as 'dialectical reasoning' present. Understand 'dialectical reasoning' as "...a way of examination that sees things and their opposites as connected" (glossary, Berman).

Alchemy up to the seventeen century was a clear expression of dialectical reasoning as well as religious symbols and myths all across traditional and indigenous cultures. They offer a richer epistemological approach towards the gestation of a more holistic paradigm. "Alchemy, as it turns out, was the last great coherent expression of participating consciousness in the West." (page 2, Berman).

Following that line of thought I believe, and I here show, the chronicle of the generation of a metaphor or a map to the understanding of our mind as an interactive reality with a collective mind, acknowledging the domains of the unconscious mind as a part of the definition of who we are. The result and the journey are a clear exhibit of a search for the expression of a participating consciousness.

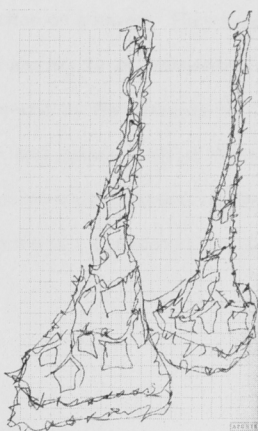




## RE-ENCHANTMENT

During most of my conscious life I have been striving for expressions of re-enchantment. In search for other types of approaches to understanding our world and who we are, looking for hints to a new epistemology that can create a more nurturing paradigm, one that will give a sensible meaning to life and a feeling of belonging to the earth and to nature. Indigenous epistemologies and cultures have been for me the sound reality upon which I have rooted most of my dreaming projections of a different world.

Indigenous mindset gives sacred meaning and value to every single interaction the individual generates. It promotes a holistic link with the domains of the unconscious, allowing the individual and group psyche to establish healthy processes of interaction and dialogue, with those domains of the mind of the unknown; with their cosmogonies and with the realities of their ancestors and the dead. Western civilization, and the development of a scientific paradigm has not given a creative outlet to the energies and information that lies in a state of chaos within the mind at the level of the unconscious domains to the common individual. We seem to be distancing from an organic understanding of ourselves, not acknowledging that we are interconnected and interdependent beings as a whole, and part of a bigger mind: life itself. In indigenous societies most cultural expressions convey and illustrate the spiritual reality of a group. Their arts, their dreams, their myths and rituals manifest as the living expression of the collective unconscious.



## DESCRIPTION OF A MENTAL INSTALLATION

The initial mental plan that I had for the final installation demanded a four wall enclosed area. An arrangement of 8 to 10 stupas of diverse sizes would rise from a spiral bed design.

Three paintings should hang from each of the four walls facing other three. In the centre of the room the arrangement of the ceramics would be encircled by them, as if twelve mirrors had been placed in a confined space, displaying the reality of a landscape of interacting stupas and spirals enclosed within. Each painting should be an unframed un-stretched canvas of 120 by 180 centimetres, interacting with each other and with the installation of the ceramics. Each painting should be a complimentary expression of the same realities expressed on the other individual paintings and appear as mirrors of the arrangement of ceramics and of the painting in front. They should show three or more cone shape figures erected as elongations of the landscape of stupas proposed by the arrangement of ceramics. These drawn cones would be escorted by a series of floating spirals. The spirals should allow the interacting individual to know that they as 2D images, are but the projection of the 3D stupas if seen from above.

The paintings offer a second level of reading that challenges directly the 'non-contradiction principle', addressed with the presence of one large face. It confronts this principle since under our current understanding of the world, two very different realities may not live in the same space and time, and what we have here is a landscape of stupas and spirals, that interact with a very separate reality, that of the canvas sized face. Each large face can be understood as being a self-reflection on a mirror. They should act as a triggers, allowing the interacting individual to start a journey to an interiorised reality, the reality of a collective dimension of the psyche, referenced by the presence of the landscape of the stupas. The interaction between the stupas and spirals both at the level of the paintings as of the sculptures, does reflect upon the interconnectedness reality of the individual's unconscious with that of a higher-level dimension in a 'Collective Unconscious'.



## ANU LOG: CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH

My journey begins on July 2003. This initial stage at the University was a bit unsettling, because that period demanded to place into balance several factors: new country, new city, new customs, another language, and suddenly become part of a vertical institution as a student. Since my initial research proposal was drafted towards an interdisciplinary PhD project, I visited and contacted professors and research postgraduate students from the Art School and from other departments such as Anthropology, Cross Cultural Research Centre and Ecology, just to mention few. I attended a couple of undergraduate courses, one given at the School of Arts by Djon Mundine, and another from Anthropology given by Shirley Campbell, ANTH2010 Anthropology of Art 2003.

Before arriving I expected to work in the sculpture workshop in order to have an appropriate setting to develop diverse sculpture skills as well as to render an installation project. I was initially received in the painting workshop under the supervision of Bob Boynes, who made arrangements for my sculpture needs enabling me to work in the ceramic workshop under the supervision of Joanne Searle.

My first couple weeks and even months, at ANU, I spent getting to know the University setting, the way things work and the family dynamics at the School of Arts, as well as adapting to the virtual University reality through the internal web.



## PRECEDENTS

During the previous creative period I travelled through back in Colombia in search of re-enchantment, dealt mainly with a recurrent image: screaming faces both on canvas and in sculpture. I explored from various diverse traditional cultures the gargoyle element in their architecture and ritual objects. Particularly those that used masks of their gods and goddesses as grotesque images keeping evil away from their buildings, their people and their sets of beliefs. The Hindu mother goddess Kali, ever present as a horrific image that brings dissolution and destruction of ignorance, and blessings for those striving for knowledge is an example of this use. For quite some period my pictures had the trait of embedded screams of all types.

As a transitional step and in the process of adaptation to my new life here at ANU, I used this referent image as an initiating junction. I decided to generate a pair of brackets that would enclose the findings on the journey ahead, and for that purpose I painted two canvases, each one with a screaming elongated head. The size of each of these individual canvases is 120 by 180 centimetres, but if displayed together as one piece, it would become a 120 by 360 centimetres item. Each canvas depicting a gargoyle facing in opposites directions, as if they were to become the bow and a stern figures respectively of a time sailing vessel. An alignment of unending white teeth is dislodged from a spiral within each scream, searching union with the other at the connecting end of each canvas, as if crisp sea foam would have been generated by the transit of the enclosed time-cruiser.

I had previously used oil bars as for drawing, but had never used them as a full painting medium. It became a new experience. I started to use them straight on the canvas, without any solvents or diluting mediums.

The process was quite stressful because I was not accomplishing that what I was used to and expecting to happen. Using them directly on to the canvas restricted my technical possibilities. I was not able to generate the colours I wanted, nor produce different gestures in the interaction with the cloth. I was not very pleased with the results.

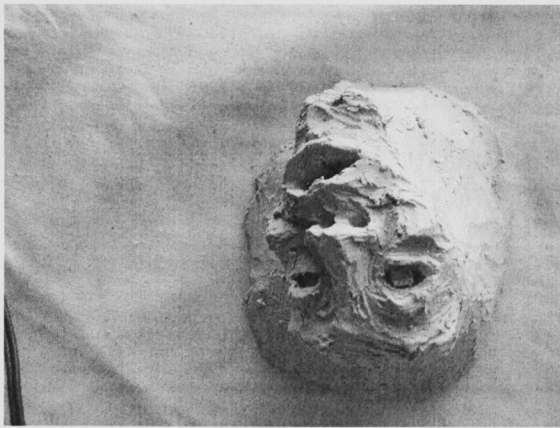
During the first six months, I worked at the ceramics workshop from four to five days of the week, 7 to 12 hours a day. The other two to three days of the week, during the first couple months I spent them at the library. I would devote very little time during the first months to my painting practice, not only because I was concentrated in creating my three dimensional

pieces, but unconsciously I would not feel comfortable there because of the limitations that the oil bars materials had imposed over me.

## CERAMICS

I worked at the ceramic workshop during my first semester. It is worth mentioning that a couple of students were very helpful at the ceramics workshop, sharing tips and guiding me through diverse steps of the process, in particular Ken Yonetani that helped me with the firing practice.

Working with clay was not new for me. I had used this vehicle of expression for several years and had always felt very comfortable working with it. I was not very sure of the results nor had a predefined picture in mind as to what was I going to work on.



I started making ceramic faces, the size of a fist, in order to re-establish contact with the medium.

Since the spiral was my central motif, the idea of pulling it out into space was the obvious move, plus it gave full meaning to the flux of time. The outcome shape would necessarily run along the lines of a cone.

Joanne gave me the basics of the coiling technique, and so I started to twirl clay into spirals and follow their path through space.

I used circular plastic lids of about 30 to 45 centimetres of diameter as the base for the structures. Coiling these pieces became a real pleasure, because I became the witness of the manifestation of an intuition. I was able to pull out this form up to 1 metre of height. My first attempt was successful and so I decided to try an even larger figure. I knew that I would have constraints when placing the pieces through the door of the kiln. Because of this restriction, my larger attempts would have to be arrangements of two or more independent pieces that would fit into each other, and when placed together would have heights ranging from 160 to 270 centimetres.

I even dared to challenge myself technically and decided to pull one up to the ceiling of the workshop, close to 300 centimetres. It took me almost one month to complete this one piece. I learnt through the process of interaction with the rising piece that I had to be very careful not to let it dehydrate, and yet be able to allow it to dry up to a point that would become stiff in order to hold the following weight in the path to the summit. I would be covering the daily outcome, with recycled plastic bags.



The dialogue with the piece while working on it was fascinating in itself, since it included a coiling process of the clay as the wall grew, and it would include the clothing process with plastic to cover it in order to avoid dehydration of the material. This wrapping process

simulated as well the twirling dynamics of the spiral in action, since the plastic bags had been tied in a chain. As it grew up to become an almost 3 metres high clay piece, it converted into a plastic sculpture, as if Christo had decided to take part in the process. At some points I wished it could be displayed just as a plastic wrap sculpture. It took over two months to let it slowly dry, and during that process it lost over 20 centimetres of height.

I have to acknowledge at this stage the fact that my pieces remained in the common area of the ceramic workshop for more than four months, getting in the way of everyone. Even though I did push them in their drying process to a corner that would not interfere in the way of other peoples work. I would like to extend my gratitude to everyone there who accepted this.



The success achieved with most of the stupas that I had toiled, pushed me to attempt an even more colossal challenge. I embarked on generating a big conical piece with faces coming out as protuberances. During the process, it received couple of hits by people moving their work around the place. Regardless of the huge obstacles I followed through with this piece. Curiously enough, this was the only piece out of nine large ceramics that did not make it in one piece because it received several contacts during its' process. Every single day I would leave the workshop just hoping that my pieces, that remained in common ground would survive the next day. This experience of being under an uncertain reality became part of the



process. It was clear for me from the very beginning the inherent unpredictable aspects to working with ceramics, since anything may happen along the way, including the mishaps at the kiln itself.

This first six months of involvement at the ceramics workshop brought another type of unpredictability to my experience as an artist. Painting is an unappeasable arena of uncertainty, with a life of its own which manifest it at every single stroke. But to add an additional variable of randomness to the brew, since all my work due to its dimensions could break from one moment to the next by working in a shared space, brought to my experience a new reality of anxiety during the creative endeavour that became quite a challenge.

The firing process was in itself another enriching feature. After the undergraduate students had been able to finish their year projects, and had left for vacations, Ken Yonetani filled me in with the information and steps required to embark on the firing process. I even followed the praying protocols he recommended in order to gratify the 'gods of fire'.

The firing programme demanded my attention several days and nights. I used the big kiln three times, and each firing would take over 72 hours, including the essential cooling period. I spent my December break involved in firing. The firing sessions were to reach temperatures over 1200 degrees Celsius, surpassing the stage of bisque. As long as I would follow a particular protocol, everything would be fine. I reached such a level of dexterity and reliability, that I was allowed by Joanne to handle my own firings.

I had been told that the kiln had a life of its own, and that in someway it was the place where defects in the structure and weak technique would be revealed.

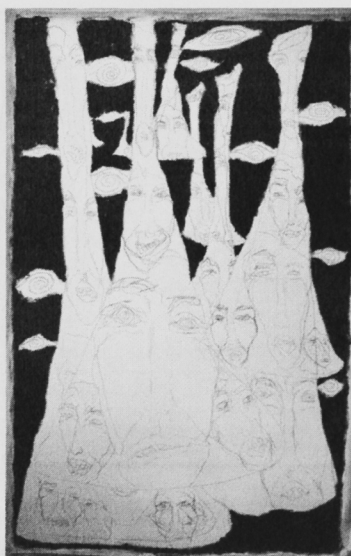
There were no surprises with most of the pieces. They did come out a little bit smaller and lighter of course, since they had lost all of the liquid weight. But I did have problems with the tallest stupa, since without knowing I mistakenly placed one of the three components in another firing, not knowing that each firing behaves differently. Everything seemed normal after I brought them out from the kiln, but at the moment of assembling them the lower part did not coincided with the upper structure. As I came to realise my mistake, my first reaction was of depression because I had been working so hard on it for months.

The lower end of the large stupa with faces, the one that had taken a lot of beating, survived the firing experience but did crack a bit at the bottom where I had mended it. While the lower half of the higher end did not survive at all, leaving an uneven cracked pinnacle. I accepted

this defeat easier than the other one because I assumed it had lived its own destiny, while the other did not work because of a wrong decision I had made.

After having worked on 9 stupas of diverse statures for one semester I vacated the ceramic workshop, and brought them to my studio space at I block. The next steps for them would include sewing, fixing, filling and painting phases.

Since November and December 2003 became hectic in the ceramic workshop, as the undergraduate students had to finish their works for assessments, I decided to stop generating more large pieces and move back to my own painting studio. I would still stop every single day to control the levels of drying, and maybe work here and there on whatever aspect of the finishing process would demand.



## PAINTING

During the two last months of the year my painting started to flow.

I had decided to embark on generating a large installation that would include twelve paintings and an arrangement of ceramics as my year's project, I knew I had to change the way I was using the oil bars, in order to feel more connected with the work. So when I came back to work at the studio in November, I started to break down each oil bar, through a time-consuming maceration process. I would place the colour gel in independent plastic



containers. This step allowed me to have more mobility and control over the materials, and in the end to be able to bring a more suitable technique to the enterprise. I started to use the now pasty oil bars with diluting mediums that allowed the use of brushes and knives. I bought couple of tubes of the missing primary colours, and started to reveal what the initial drawings were suggesting.

I was able to work during the months of November-December on six canvases. All of them worked with oils. I worked on three canvases at a time in order to allow the painted areas in each one to dry while operating on another. I worked three at a time, giving a distinct hallmark to that series, as they would be hung in groups of 3 per wall. Due to the slow drying process of the oils I was not able to finish these before January.



## DARWIN

My experience with diverse indigenous cultures back in Colombia led me to think I could have access to certain aboriginal communities and sacred rituals in Australia. But from the very beginning, I could even say, that at my welcoming meeting with Nigel Lendon, a different reality was placed before my eyes. Without knowing, in those first five minutes of interaction, he gave me a clear taste of the unfeasibility of following through and being able to have right of entry to any of the realities I wanted to examine. Two years have gone by,

and at this very moment I can confirm that the hunch I was left with that first day, was proved correct. Regardless of his conviction, he made all the efforts along the way to see if I could find some way into the territory of the aboriginal reality. In that exercise of generating a possibility for me, he made arrangements for me to leave ANU for one semester and spend some time in the Northern Territory. He made plans for me to join a group of researchers, as a volunteer during June and July. But I had to sit down and wait in Darwin until the project began. Darwin was a very interesting experience in itself, and for couple months I became part of a city that has a very different feeling to it from other cities in Australia.

I did not embark on any creative activity during the months I spent in Darwin, and there is one main reason for it, the main purpose for that trip was to be able to get out to the outback in Arnhem Land, and for that I needed mobility. I had been working towards an installation most of the time, dealing with heavy and large pieces of ceramic, and had very clear in my mind that I had to work on a series of rather large canvases that I would not be able to carry along during this period. I devoted most of my time to the library and to get to know Darwin and its people.

At Charles Darwin University I attended a month course in Yolgnu language as part of the training for the journey ahead during June and July.

I met Victoria Cattoni, PhD. student at the School of Arts that linked me to a project of Art and Religiosity that was to happen in Bali during late March early April. I took advantage of this opportunity to have access to sacred rituals involving art, within a traditional culture. I was not getting it in Darwin at that point, so I headed off to Bali. I would take advantage of the couple following months and travel around Asia in order to visit the Buddhist stupa of Borubudur in Java, and the temples of Angkor Watt in Cambodia. I would return to Darwin towards the end of May, to reconnect with the plans that Nigel had arranged for me.

#### IN SEARCH OF RE-ENCHANTMENT

In search of expressions of participating consciousness I decide to be part in 'Sharing Art & Religiosity' event to take place in Bali towards the end of March and early April 2004. It took place at the Pura Samuan Tiga (Temple) in Bedulu. Bali. Its main purpose was the generation of the Barong Pa-Hayu Buwana, or World Peace Barong. In the Balinese culture barong is a mystical lion-like animal that appears in a dancing pilgrimage to support peace and

goodness. This World Peace Barong was born in March 2004 in the area of Pura Samuan Tiga – a one thousand year-old temple of conciliation in Bedulu, Bali. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the dialogue between the traditions of the Bali Aga (animism), Hinduism, and Buddhism at this temple formed the principles and ritual practices of Bali Hinduism.

This was a gathering of artists and individuals with diverse faiths, traditions and religious and non-religious backgrounds (mainly from a secular reality), that contributed through their intentions for world peace, placed and displayed in objects and performances, to generate the life of a 'world peace caretaker and promoter' spirit that would inhabit the Barong.

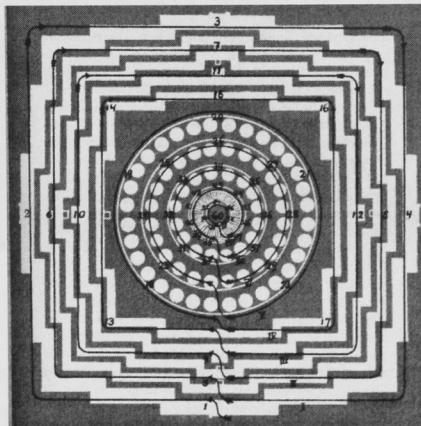


## BORUBUDUR

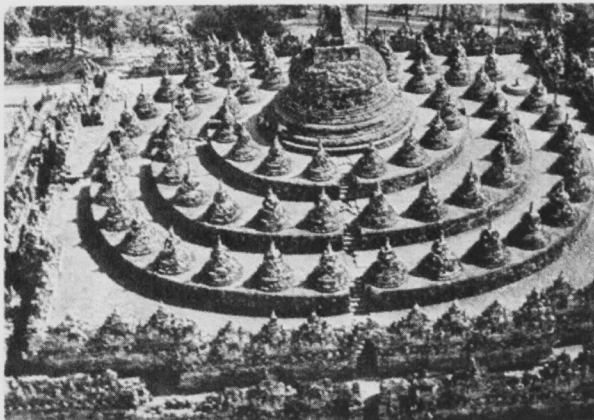
I deliberately went to Indonesia having in mind the Buddhist Stupa of Borubudur.

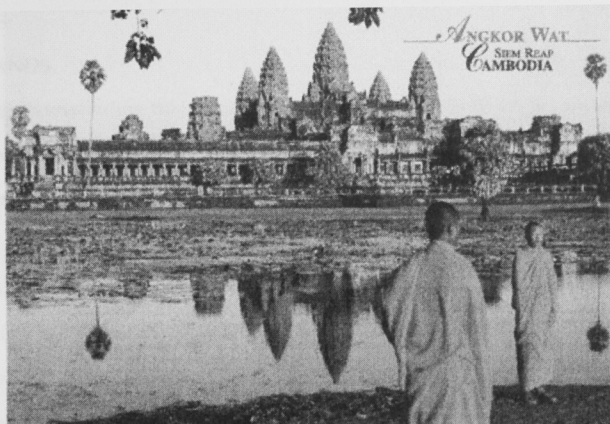
The Buddhist Stupa is a symbol of the path to enlightenment. "The stupa, accordingly, is as much a memorial for the Buddhas and saints of the past as a guide to the enlightenment of every individual and a pledge for the Buddhas to come." (page 61, Govinda). The ascendant path from knowledge to enlightenment is present in the stupa. Such path demands the embracing of a life style that shares both morality and meditation. "Concentration...is an instrument for the attainment of insight (vipassana) and wisdom (panna), which in turn,

produces a higher form of morality and concentration until, by this spiral-like progression (in which the same elements reappear on each stage in greater intensity), Bodhi or enlightenment is attained.”(page 63, Govinda).



Borubudur was built in the 8<sup>th</sup> century belonging to the later Mahayana period. (Govinda). This monument as a temple depicts the story of life of Buddha on his way to enlightenment, all along the rising spiral-like path.

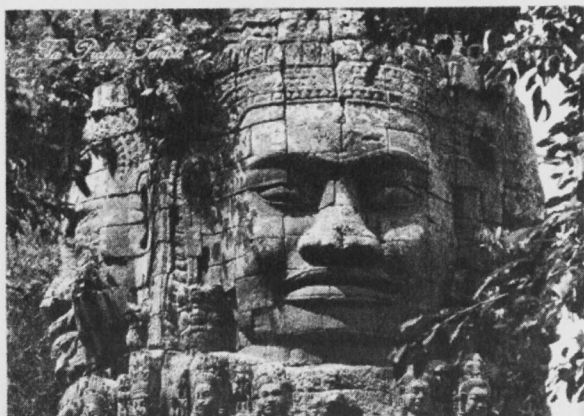




## ANGKOR

In my search for re-enchantment, the pilgrimage brought me to Angkor in Cambodia, a city built in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. There are many temples at Angkor, but two of them in particular were my main aim: Angkor Wat and Banyon Temple.

My interest in both of these Buddhist temples relates with the stupas as expression of a path to enlightenment. Angkor Wat by itself is considered one of the ten wonders of the world, and it certainly leaves a deep lasting impression. What made Banyon so interesting to me is the presence of hundreds of faces as bas-relief all over the stupa, resembling in a way the hallmark to most of my previous paintings during the last fifteen years.





## KEY IMAGES:

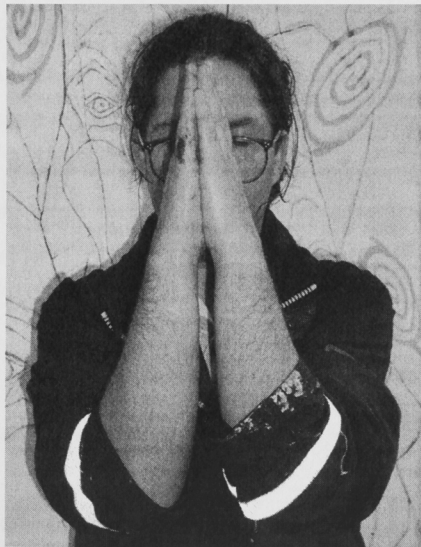
### -PRAYER HANDS

As I am riding an unwinding trail to re-enchantment through every single one of my acts, one of the most wonderful gestures to which I was exposed during the period of my Masters program, was the hands in prayer salutation all over Asia. It became part of my life during the period of time that I spent in Indonesia, Thailand and Cambodia (May-June 2004).

It is a dignifying and a humble way of acknowledging the 'other'. It is a way of bringing into your daily life a sacred reality in which you are connected with the outside world. You can speculate that the within space generated by this gesture is a symbol of sharing your heart with the other, and/or wishing illumination for the other.

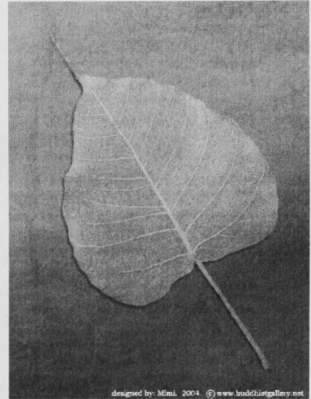
It is a symbol of unity, as opposites connect by the act of clasping the hands. Opposites collapse in order to bring illumination, ying and yang intertwine. There is a clear resemblance between the geometry of the stupa and that of the form that under the salutation gesture of the hands in prayer.

I introduce the image of the prayer hands into this account because it will certainly permeate and be present in my future art exploration as an extension of the stupa reality, and because in some way it is a living cultural expression that brings re-enchantment.



## -BODHI LEAF

The story tells that Buddha reached enlightenment under a Banyan tree (*Ficus Benghalensis* or *Religiosa*), and since then the Bodhi (tree of knowledge) leaf has been a symbol of Buddhism. The Bodhi leaf figure resembles the representation of stupas. I include this image to acknowledge another symbol that reflects issues of life's time course, and upon consciousness and meditation (mind realm) as a path to understanding oneself.



Curiously enough the image of one of my ceramic sculptures, displayed as one of the main pieces of the installation, which has many faces on a bas-relief, not only relates to the Banyon Temple in Angkor but also reminds us of the Bodhi leaf. If we mentally allow a Bodhi leaf to gyrate, the particular three-dimensional virtual image revealed would resonate with the plane of the shape of the ceramic. I was not conscious of the similarity between a Bodhi leaf and the revolving faces piece.

## FORCED LEAVE

I had to cancel my plans to visit Arnhem Land because I was forced to return to Colombia due to a family illness.

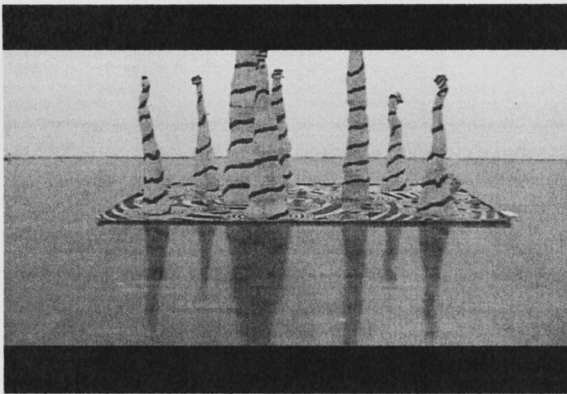
During the period of time in Colombia I did over ten photographic sessions with a black model. I took over 250 black and white photographs of body painting over this model. I



would spend a couple hours preparing the body with diverse types of flours, clays and colours in each session.

I kept on painting back in Colombia, but the main source of ideas came from emotional images that I had brought back from my journey around Indonesia and Cambodia. I should mention that my body of work on process left at ANU, the whole spiral-stupa exploration was left motionless as a distinct reality of my experience in Australia. I did couple large murals. I will not go into details of this leave period.

After things had settled down back at home, I was given consent to return back to ANU to finish my program during the first semester of 2005.



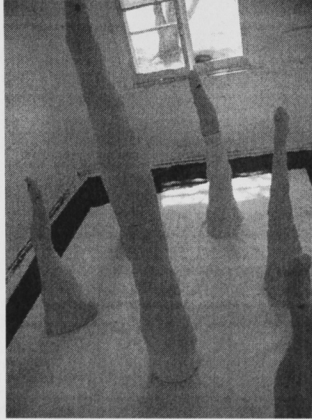
#### BUILDING THE STUPAS

I returned to ANU by early February 2005. I had been able to leave all of my art in process safely stored at my studio. My first duty back at my studio was to put together and paint the fired ceramic pieces; bring them back to life. I had unpleasant feelings during my leave period of having back at the school an unfinished job. After having gone through a long wait I was face to face once again with this, which had to be resolved. The posters for a prize show The Phoenix: spiritual art exhibit, came out during those first days. I decided to work very hard, and put together the full ceramic installation for that exhibit in early April. This pledge obliged me to work very hard in bringing them to life after a long period of neglect.

I used plastic adhesive glue to bind parts, and used a red ochre gap filler to recover surfaces. It was quite a surprise for me to come across with a material with a colour resembling the

colour of this land and to see how fit it worked with the ceramic pieces. I decided to use it as well as part of the covering layers, specifically for the lines that would show the ascending path of the spiral on the ceramics.

I invested almost four weeks working on all the pieces and painting over them. I proceeded then to paint a canvas of 180 by 250 centimetres that would become the canvas mat for the installation.



I placed the arrangement of ceramics on the white canvas, in order to visualise the areas in which the spirals should be painted, and then went on to stretch the canvas on the panels of my studio. It took me over three weeks to complete.

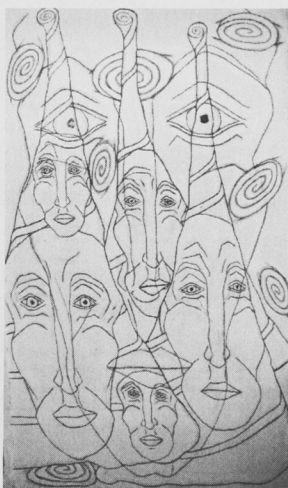
Simultaneously I worked back at home, on 21 small clay faces. I devoted between 2 to 3 hours per item in order to let them dry for couple weeks before firing. Joanne Searle allowed me to fire them with objects of her students. Unlike my stupa pieces, these ones went only up to bisque firing, a fragile stage for a ceramic piece. But they came out of the kiln just a week before the exhibit, and they needed to go through the painting process.

The installation was completed just on time for the opening date of the Phoenix exhibit. Two heads broke during the period that the installation remained in the exhibit.



## REWINDING

Once the installation was placed successfully at the exhibit, I started to feel a sense of release from technical problems of ceramics. I returned back to my painting studio and engaged myself in working on the second series of six canvases required for the final assessment exhibit. I stretched the canvases, prepared them with two layers of Gesso, and started to work on each drawing. It took several weeks to arrive at a stage in which the diffuse drawing in a monochromatic white painting, allowed the two different levels to be read clearly.

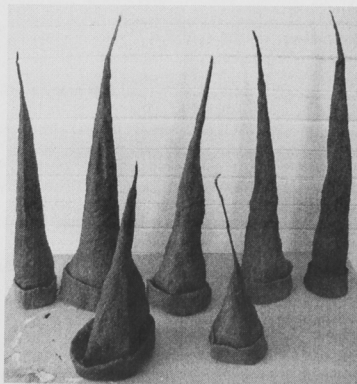


I had at that point a mid-semester assessment and was encouraged by several people to consider not bringing this series to full colour, but to stay at the current white phase. At first I was reluctant to change my long-term plan, but the idea of working with very limited colour, started to have more appeal for the next couple weeks.

I kept enriching the white colour all over the paintings, but due to the fact that the lines of the painting, could easily get lost I started to look for a wax drawing pencil that would allow me not to lose the drawing under further layers of white. I spoke with many people, visited main art stores, and still no one was able to offer a way out to this crossroads. After more than three weeks of not knowing how to handle this puzzle, Bridget Nicholson a graduate student at the Sculpture workshop presented me a crayon pencil that is used at wood workshops. During this period I decided to paint two canvases with the scenic view of the stupas, without interacting with a large face. I used primary colours for this version. I made as well another spiral mat to be placed under the arrangement of another similar installation of stupas, using seven cone shape indigenous hats that I brought from Colombia.

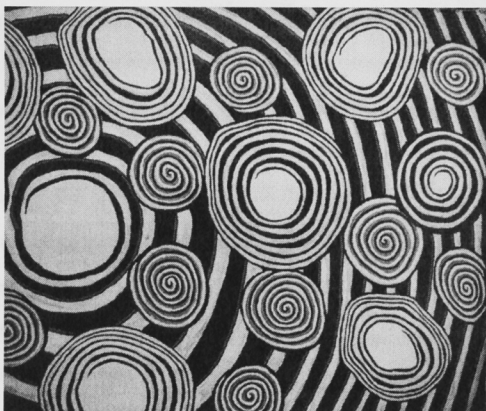
For the duration of the last month the set of six monochromatic acrylics followed their own growth and without being able to bury the new shades under a deep white glaze, it became necessary to let them follow the preconceived idea of having a body of 12 coloured canvases to be part of the installation.

It was a tough decision and not an easy one, since the white solution had strongly resonated within me for several weeks and it would have been easier to let them rest at that early stage. In order to have them ready for the assessment exhibit on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, I had to work full time on them.



## SEVEN BARK HATS

As part of my final assessment exhibit I decided to generate an additional shadow-kind of extension to the ceramic stupas. It would allow the viewer to experience an aerial perspective on the installation (a point raised by painting lecturer Ruth Waller at the painting assessment on May the 19<sup>th</sup>). It would include a 120 by 180 centimetres canvas mat painted with seven spiral images, as feet to their elongation in space, through seven stretched bark fibre conical hats. I brought these indigenous hats back from Colombia not knowing exactly if I could use them in an installation or if they would be of any use for my school program. They are made by a group of African heritage community of a tropical rain forest in Colombia and used for non-sacred purposes, but as a body adornment. They do resemble the image of the stupas.



## INSTALLATION FINAL SETTING

The assessment exhibit was scheduled for 29<sup>th</sup> of June until 3<sup>rd</sup> of July 2005, at the Gallery of the ANU School of Art. Due to the fact that the Gallery was going to be shared by three graduating students, my initial plan of having a surrounded setting, changed in the curatorial process. The twelve paintings were arranged in sets of six in two walls facing each other, enclosing the ceramic installation.





#### PENDING ISSUES

At the closing stage of my program, Professor Ruth Waller opened for me a couple of avenues to explore ahead; one of them, Tim Johnson, and the other the existence of a group of artists that were gathered under an exhibit in Paris in 1989, known as "Les Magiciens de la Terre". It is a relevant piece of information to know of an Australian artist that resonates at a certain level with my art and spiritual quest.

I should also acknowledge another relevant artist that I became aware of his work just a month or two before the end of my program, Montien Boonma. If I had known at an earlier stage of my MVA the existence of these artists, perhaps the outcome of my work would have been different. In some way they will become the light ahead to follow, and that will have huge impact in my coming artwork.



## FINAL WORDS

I believe that artists have a huge social and cultural responsibility. We the artists move with ease in the lands of the irrational, of the unknown. We are like receivers, listening to the voice of the spirit of an era and of the land. We are not constrained by the demands of rationale logic and scientific causality but we embrace dialectical reasoning. No linear thinking process is displayed but rather a spiralling holistic approach of gathering, connecting diverse and dissimilar information in time and direction. In this sense I assume that we have a parallel social function as a Shaman within an indigenous context. Our playground is the mind's unconscious as it is for the holy man. We have a guiding role for our society.

We have the capacity to separate ourselves from predetermined conventions, stare at the large picture with an icy gaze, and bring to life new ways of interaction and new discourses; even if our personal lives may seem to be the messiest and most inarticulate of all. We are walking thru dark regions of the mind and we are dealing with the questions that have no 'right' answers. We then carry the responsibility of being independent souls, to be true and genuine with our selves and paths; to not get lost in our ego's ambitions and to be available allowing entrance to the energy present at wavelengths of deep collective unconscious dimensions.



## BRIEF PORTRAIT

I have a post-graduate second bachelors degree in Psychology earned at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, and a 5 year interdisciplinary Bachelors of Art from the Universidad de los Andes, Bogota. I have been a self-trained artist for almost 19 years.

During my artistic life, my artwork has been an exploration of my experience of being, at the most collective levels of the mind, becoming a main outlet to generate personal answers to the great questions of existence.

I have nourished my way along art history from diverse artists such as (the list could be very long, but I will make a short attempt) Michelangelo and all the Italian muralists to artists such as Kandinsky, Klee, Kirchner, Braque, Max Ernst, Mondrian, Pollock, Bacon, Auerbach, just to mention very few. The list of Latin-American artists would also be lengthy, but I will disclose Guayasamin, Caballero and the Mexican muralists.

Even though my initial approach to the world of the arts came through my contact with Western history, the development of my own work has found an important nurturing fountain within the sacred dimension of indigenous art.

One can find, that in Western art, the Surrealist movement in the XX th century, dared to explore mind areas and creative processes that in some deep way connect with 'Primitive art', allowing the expression of an unconscious dimension, that has no logical, factual or reasonable possible explanation. In my own work I have been able to generate experiences that fall beyond my particular historical ego knowledge, reaching certain areas of creation that are far distant from my will and control. When working on a canvas or with clay, the initial strokes obey a general idea formed in my conscious mind, followed by automatic, uncontrolled and independent actions demanded by the artwork, as if it had gained suddenly a life of its own.

My art reflects convictions that have taken shape over the years including:

- Everything is undeniably connected. Reality is one and total, non-fragmented and interdependent.
- We are accumulated and organized energy rather than free-willed mass of matter, as quantum mechanics plainly shows.
- On an epistemological level we build our knowledge and reality models through gestalt, totalizing rather than adding the different fragments of reality.

- Man's greatest problem lies at the level of communication, both outwards with our surroundings as well as inwards in order to know and understand oneself.
- Art nourishes itself from collective mind springs and settings and acts as a mirror to reflect the inner self.
- Creation in any field has a life of its own and is autonomous from the artist's ego, understanding the artist as a medium.

I have approached myths and rituals by which I could explore the coincidence of opposites, in other words the presence of totality in nature. Indigenous art lives within a reality of participating consciousness, allowing holistic approaches of the individual own self-understanding. They reflect the expression of a healthier mind and a more sustainable economical, ecological and cultural balanced project.

Over different periods I have shared my life with native communities in my country. The Choco and the Guajira regions have nourished me spiritually, particularly because of the confluence of black and native cultures, and the most outrageous landscapes the mind can imagine, as is generally true of all of Colombia.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

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### EDUCATION:

- -Australian National University, Canberra
  - -Master in Visual Arts, July 2005
- -University of Massachusetts, Amherst.
  - -Post-graduate second bachelors B.S. degree in Psychology, May 1991.
- -Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá
  - -Psychology, January 1989 - May 1990.
- -Universidad de los Andes, Bogotá
  - -Undergraduate B.A. degree in Business Administration, December 1987.

### WORK EXPERIENCE:

- -ARTIST since 1986.
- -Gourmet Club ( cuisine publishing company), Bogotá. 1995-2003.
- (cook book): 'Mesarte': In-house artist, desktop-publisher, Graphic -Designer, illustrator and Photograph setup designer.
- -Foundations Inc., Holyoke, Mass. USA. September 1991-January 1993
  - Counselor in a Half-way mental health program.
  - Painting therapy with mental health patients.
- -Amherst College. September 1991 - December 1992
  - Teaching Assistant in Spanish
- -Fundacion Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. June-August of 1990
  - Peace settlement program- Volunteer research work with indigenous communities (Arsarios and Arhuacos).
- Universidad de los Andes. January-July 1990
  - Art teacher for economically under-privileged children: (volunteer program).
- -Ministry of Agriculture. National Fishing-game project, November 1988-May 1990
  - Project Director- program geared toward promoting the growth and competence of the small-fishing communities around the country.
- -Koor Intertrade-Bogotá, January-September 1988
  - Internship in Israel, Technology in agriculture in Kibbutz and Moshavs.

### GROUP SHOWS:

- -Re-creations: Colombian Versions of the History of Art.  
Galería Centro Colombo-Americano, Bogotá. 09-10 de 1997.
- -Fundación Alzate Avendaño, Bogotá. 10-11, 1995.
- -Latin-american Art. Instituto Italo-Latinoamericano, EUR, Roma, Italia. 06-07, 1995
- -The Gallery Artists. Galería Iriarte, Bogotá. 06-08, 1994.
- -Mother Tongue, Mother Earth. Hoho's Canal Gallery, Holyoke, Mass. USA.
- 08-09, 1993
- -Twenty-five Perspectives. Hoho's Canal Gallery, Holyoke, Mass. USA. 10-11, 1992
- -Latin-american Art. Springfield College, Springfield Mass, USA. 12, 1991
- -Latin-american Art: Seven Perspectives. Augusta Savage Gallery. University of Massachusetts, Amherst, USA. 11, 1991.
- -Latin-american Art. Hoho's Canal Gallery, Holyoke, Mass. USA. 05-06, 1991
- -Sacred Love, Regenerate Art. Northampton Studios, Northampton, Mass, USA. 12, 1990.
- -The Gallery Artists. Galería Iriarte, Bogotá. 06-07, 1990.
- -Salón Séneca. Galería Ictex. Universidad de los Andes. 05, 1990.
- -Salón Séneca. Galería Marta Traba. Universidad de los Andes. 12, 1989.
- -Salón Séneca. Universidad de los Andes. 05, 1989.
- -Cooperartes. 05 1987.

#### ONE-MAN SHOWS:

- -Faces in Silence. Santillana Foundation. Bogota, 03, 2003.
- -Retrospective show. Reflection: an Installation. Museum of Contemporary Art, Bogotá, 07-08, 2001.
- -Mesarte: Simultaneous show with the retrospective.  
Chamber of Commerce of Bogotá, Bogota, 07-08, 2001.
- -Objects of Desire. Galería Centro Colombo-Americano, Bogotá. 09, 1998
- -Staring within. Colombian-German Chamber of Commerce, Bogotá. 08, 1998
- -Totems. Galería Consulado en Miami. 06-07, 1997.
- -Androgynia. Coincidentia oppositorum or the mystery of wholeness.  
Galería Centro Colombo-Americano, Bogotá. 07-08, 1996
- -Gestalt Faces. Goulandris Horn Foundation, Athens, Greece. 10, 1994.
- -Gestalt. Foreign Relations Ministry, Bogotá. 05-06, 1994.
- -Colombian Artists in New York. Galería Consulado en Nueva York. 06-07, 1993.
- -Masks. 500 years of the discovery of the Americas. George Walter  
Vincent Smith Museum. Springfield, Mass., USA. 11, 1992 -01, 1993.
- -Abstract-Figurative Art. Galería Iriarte, Bogotá. 03, 1992.

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INTERNET SITE: [www.buddhamind.info/leftside/art/bod-leaf.htm](http://www.buddhamind.info/leftside/art/bod-leaf.htm)